



**Final Report: President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities (PCAH)**

Submitted by Sarah Stephens, the Center for Democracy in the Americas  
May 19, 2016

**Introduction**

It was an honor and a privilege for the Center for Democracy in the Americas (CDA) to serve as the consultant to the President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities for its cultural mission to Cuba.

The PCAH mission produced several initiatives that will strengthen arts and cultural collaboration between U.S. and Cuban scholars, artists, public agencies, and institutions. As provided under our agreement, we are pleased to submit this report to explain the events and meetings that took place during the PCAH visit to Cuba, record the accomplishments, and provide recommendations for follow-up activities to advance the mission’s goals.

The following report includes:

- Background
- Trip Preparation
- Event Summaries
- Outcomes
- Impact Assessment
- Next Steps
- (Appendix) Media Coverage

Thanks to the leadership of Megan Beyer, PCAH executive director, we helped to successfully manage a process that incorporated the expertise and priorities of three federal agencies, facilitated work with Cuba’s government, and produced an itinerary equal to the stature of the delegation, along with accomplishments worthy of the significance of the visit.

## **Background**

When Presidents Barack Obama and Raúl Castro announced their agreement to restore diplomatic relations on December 17, 2014, U.S.-Cuba relations entered a period of significant transformation. On March 19, 2016, President Obama landed in Cuba and became the first sitting US president to visit the island in over 85 years. In a historic speech broadcast across the island, President Obama offered the Cuban people “el saludo de paz,” a greeting of peace and a month later, the President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities’ Cultural Delegation to Cuba had the opportunity to offer “una canción de paz,” a song of peace.

The PCAH visit to Cuba took place from April 18-21, 2016. While cultural exchanges at the non-governmental level, according to one analysis, comprise almost half of all U.S.-Cuba exchanges, this trip was historic because it was the first official (government-to-government) cultural mission since 1959.

The delegation included the highest ranking leaders from U.S. cultural institutions: George Stevens, Jr. and Margo Lion, co-chairs of the President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities (PCAH); Megan Beyer, Executive Director of PCAH; Jane Chu, Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts; William Adams, Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities; and, David Skorton, Secretary of the Smithsonian Institute. The delegation included the following PCAH Member artists Kal Penn, Alfre Woodard, and John Lloyd Young, as well as PCAH Members Rick Arriola, Stephanie Cutter, Fred Goldring, Pamela Joyner, Eric Ortner, Ken Solomon, Janet Keller, Anne Luzzatto, Liz Manne, Kim Taylor, Jill Cooper Udall, and Andrew Weinstein. The delegation also included renowned U.S. artists, actors, and musicians Joshua Bell, Adele Chatfield-Taylor, Martha Clarke, John Guare, DJ IZ, Lourdes Lopez, Larisa Martinez, Dave Matthews, Kal Penn, Smokey Robinson, and Usher. Guests and spouses also attended.

## **Trip Preparation**

The planning for the PCAH cultural mission began with coordination among the federal cultural partners which, in turn, was made possible by all-hands Cuba planning meetings that took place biweekly and kept the entire team aligned and informed.

Meetings with Ambassador José Ramón Cabañas and First Secretary Bernardo Toscano at Cuba’s Embassy helped us identify the obstacles we needed to address in order to realize the opportunities for this cultural mission. For example, at the first meeting on January 26, Ambassador Cabañas raised concerns about the timing of the trip which overlapped with Cuba’s Communist Party Congress, scheduled to take place from April 17-19, 2016. The fact that the Cubans approved the dates for a moment that the government’s resources were stretched thin indicated their strong commitment to making the trip work and to promoting cultural exchange into the future.

After the dates were locked down, CDA and PCAH staff members visited Cuba on an advance trip. From February 17-19, we met with representatives of the Ministry of Culture (MINCULT) including Vice-Minister Fernando Rojas Gutiérrez, Director of International Relations Alfredo Ruiz Roche, Director of Communications Ivette Leyva García, Deputy Director of the International Relations Department Rosa T. Rodríguez, and Marisol Peraza Simón and Teresa García Castro, North America Specialists.

These face-to-face meetings facilitated our ability to plan events and resolve problems. For example, Vice Minister Rojas expressed his concern that MINCULT had not received a formal invitation to participate in the Smithsonian's Folklife Festival in 2017.<sup>1</sup> That enabled the PCAH advance team to take immediate action by getting in touch with the Smithsonian Institution to ensure that the Vice Minister received a formal letter the next day.

A smaller advance team traveled to Cuba from April 3-6 to finalize the itinerary, visit venues, and meet with Cuban artists who played critical roles in creating opportunities for Cuban and U.S. musicians to perform together in ways that demonstrated the promise of expanded cultural cooperation.

On April 14, [the Ministry of Culture](#) and [PCAH](#) issued public statements formally announcing the trip. For more media mentions, see the Media Coverage section at the end of the report.

## **Event Summaries**

### April 17

The President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities delegation met at the Betsy Hotel in Miami, FL, at 6 pm for a briefing that was provided by PCAH Member and Miami County Commissioner Ricky Arriola, as well as Former US Ambassador to Switzerland, Congressman Don Beyer. The Swiss Embassy was commissioned to represent US interests in Cuba before the re-opening of the US Embassy, mediating issues with the US. Embassy in Bern, Switzerland.

### April 18

The delegation arrived in Havana, Cuba at noon on Monday, April 18. Ambassador Jeffrey DeLaurentis, Chargé d'affaires at the U.S. Embassy in Havana, and Alfredo Ruiz Roche, Director of International Relations at Cuba's Ministry of Culture, received the delegation at José Martí International Airport. Following our arrival, the Ministry of Culture hosted a lunch at El

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<sup>1</sup> The Folklife Festival is hosted by the Smithsonian Institution's Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage on the National Mall for two weeks every summer to honor the cultural traditions and contributions of a particular nation, region, state, or theme. The 2014 diplomatic breakthrough in U.S.-Cuba relations made it possible for the Smithsonian Institution to invite Cuba to work together to sustain cultural heritage and present Cuban culture at the 2017 Folklife Festival.

Sauce Cultural Center, where the delegation had the chance to meet representatives of Cuba's Ministry of Foreign Relations (MINREX) and leaders of several cultural institutions, including the Office of the Historian of Havana (OHC), Cuban Institute of Music (ICM), National Council of Visual Arts (CNAP), National Council of Performing Arts (CNAE), National Council of Cultural Heritage (CNPC), Cuban Film Institute (ICAIC), and El Instituto Superior de Artes (ISA). George Stevens, Jr., PCAH Co-chair, provided remarks.

Following lunch, the delegation went to El Instituto Superior de Artes (ISA), the premier Cuban arts university, to see student performances and art studios, and join a press conference with Cuban counterparts. Margo Lion, PCAH Co-chair, provided remarks. After the school visit, some delegation members attended a special presentation by children's theater troupe, La Colmenita; others participated in a music event in the Regla community (organized by hip-hop duo, Obsesión); and the balance conversed with Cuban intellectuals at a meeting convened at the Hotel Saratoga. The delegation gathered together for dinner at El Cocinero, a privately-run restaurant (or, in Spanish, a *paladar*), which was followed by performances by delegation members Joshua Bell and Dave Matthews with Carlos Varela and other Cuban musicians.

#### April 19

In the morning, the PCAH co-chairs Executive Director and Deputy Director had a bilateral working meeting with MINCULT Vice Minister Fernando Rojas while NEA Chairman Jane Chu had a bilateral working meeting with representatives from the National Council of Performing Arts (CNAE). The rest of the delegation visited the offices of the Institute of Cuban Art and Cinematography (ICAIC) and the community art project led by José Rodríguez Fuster ("Fuster," a multi-faceted Cuban artist whose has been compared to Gaudí) in the neighborhood of Jaimanitas.

At ICAIC, half of the delegation was greeted by a large and diverse array of Cuban directors, producers, actors, and administrators from ICAIC. Following an introduction by the head of the Center, the hosts showed our delegation the trailer from a recent Cuban historical feature film on the War of Independence from Spain. In addition, Ivan Giroud, the head of the Latin American Film Festival, addressed the delegation. A member of the delegation, Kal Penn, the actor and producer, also spoke at ICAIC and announced that Sundance Festival and the Latin American Film Festival are collaborating to host two film screenings in Havana this summer. The other half of the delegation visited Fuster in Jaimanitas to observe and appreciate his mosaic tiles and sculptures comprising his public art project. With Fuster, they discussed the art, technique, and community impact of his work.

In the afternoon, some delegation members visited children at the Miguel Fernández Roig Primary School in Cayo Hueso Consejo Popular in the Centro Habana municipality within Havana. Another group of delegation members went to a Santería drumming ceremony, an intimate and beautiful ritual to honor Afro-Cuban ancestors. Other delegation members attended

a panel discussion on the Creative Economy hosted by the Ministry of Culture and co-led by PCAH members Eric Ortner and Ken Solomon where delegation members presented and exchanged ideas with representatives of Cuban institutions such as ICAIC, the artistic and literary promotion corporation of Cuba (Artex), and the national record label of Cuba (EGREM).

In the late afternoon, some members of the delegation toured Finca Vigía, Ernest Hemingway's home which is preserved as a museum by Cuba's government, while others visited the famous music studios of the national recording company, EGREM. At Finca Vigía, the delegation received an exclusive tour from Ada Rosa Rosales, Director of Finca Vigía. Following the tour, New York Times columnist and author David Brooks, a member of the delegation, gave brief remarks about Ernest Hemingway.

Those who attended the EGREM event received a tour of the studio. The delegation heard from guitarist Eliades Ochoa, one of the few remaining members of the world-renowned Buena Vista Social Club. After the tour, the delegation went downstairs to a room where they were greeted by a large band. Cuban musicians and music producers were also in attendance, and many musicians – both Americans and Cubans – went on stage to improvise and dance together.

That evening, members of the delegation attended a reception co-hosted by Ludwig Foundation and Ministry of Culture. Afterward, Ella Cisneros, a Cuban-American and prominent art collector, hosted the delegation for dinner and music by Kelvis Ochoa and David Torrens at her home.

#### April 20

While the US Ambassador hosted artists and other delegates for a presentation by NEH Chairman Bro Adams at the US Embassy Residence, The Cuban Ministry of Culture hosted a final bilateral meeting with the leaders from the federal agencies. Next, the entire delegation received a tour of the Cuban Fine Arts Museum and then watched the Rosario Cárdenas dance group perform in the interior atrium of the Museum. Then, participants moved to the auditorium for a panel discussion on the arts moderated by Jane Chu. Meanwhile, William Adams and PCAH members attended a bilateral meeting with representatives of Cuba's National Counsel of Heritage and the Office of the Historian of Havana, to announce the NEH U.S.-Cuba conservation program and proposal for an architecture exchange through Frank Gehry's firm.

In the afternoon, delegation members had the choice to meet with artists and leaders at Cuban Institute of Music (ICM), visit Liza Alfonso Dance Company academy, or visit the art studio of Cuban painter and sculptor Choco. Jane Chu, John Lloyd Young, Bro Adams, and Megan Beyer attended the ICM meeting. The closing dinner was hosted at La Fábrica de Arte Cubano (F.A.C.) founded by the Cuban artist and composer X Alfonso. F.A.C. has been described as a meeting-place "where the best of the island's avant-garde arts can be enjoyed, with all the artistic manifestations under the same roof and with prices making it accessible to the majority of

Cubans.”<sup>2</sup> X Alfonso gave brief words after F.A.C. Children’s choir performed and then, Joshua Bell played with the Chamber Orchestra of Havana directed by Daiana García. John Lloyd Young also performed with pianist Harold Lopez-Nussa after dinner before the group moved into a larger concert venue within La Fábrica de Arte with invited guests for a concert where Síntesis, Gaston Joya, Omara Portuondo, Harold Lopez-Nussa, Eme Alfonso, X Alfonso, Yasek Manzano, Zule Guerra, Aldo Lopez-Gavilan, Dave Matthews, Usher, Smokey Robinson, Carlos Varela, and Kelvis Ochoa made appearances.

#### April 21

On the final day, the Ministry of Culture hosted a closing bilateral press conference at the Gran Teatro of Havana to announce joint commitments to ongoing cultural exchanges as the delegation discussed with Cuba’s government during the trip. Announcements included U.S.-Cuba artistic/cultural exchanges supported by the National Endowment for the Arts, an art conservation program supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities, a proposal for a Frank Gehry architectural exchange, and a joint statement released by the Smithsonian Institution and the Cuban National Council of Cultural Heritage.

PCAH also made announcements regarding the Sundance Film Festival, the National Arts and Humanities Youth Program, and contributions by the U.S. architect, Frank Gehry (for more information, see the Outcome Review section below).

### **Outcomes**

#### Film Forward

PCAH announced that the Sundance Institute is collaborating with the Latin American Film Festival to screen two films, *Amy and Me* and *Earl and The Dying Girl*, and hold workshops and discussions on the humanities themes raised by the film, while in Cuba this summer. The Sundance Film Forward screening is part of the Institute’s plans to deepen its work in Cuba, building on work in Cuba that it began in 1989.

#### National Arts and Humanities Youth Program Awards

PCAH announced that it will recognize Cuba this year with its National Arts and Humanities Youth Program (NAHYP) 2016 International Spotlight honor. The Director of NAHYP visited several after-school programs, including Liza Alfonso Dance Academy, La Colmenita, La Casa del Niño y La Niña, to be considered for the award. PCAH will announce the honoree in the fall of 2016.

#### Architecture and Frank Gehry

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<sup>2</sup> X Alfonso quote from [Lahabana.com](http://Lahabana.com)

In a meeting with the Office of the Historian, PCAH announced that Frank Gehry has offered to promote the cross-sharing of knowledge about best practices in the field through a dialogue with experienced Cuban architects. While Mr. Gehry was not part of the PCAH delegation to Cuba, he has visited the island and plans to return to host the dialogue in 2017. He will also invite aspiring Cuban architects to join his firm for summer-long fellowships in 2016 and 2017.

#### Frost School of Music

PCAH announced that University of Miami's Frost School of Music will offer four full tuition scholarships for Cuban students wishing to pursue master's degrees in music in the United States.

#### Turnaround Arts

Without securing final confirmation from the Ministry of Culture, PCAH announced that it intended that Cuba would be the first international Turnaround Arts School during a visit Escuela primaria Miguel Fernández Roig del Consejo Popular de Cayo Hueso in Centro Habana. This occurred despite statements by the Ministry of Culture in several meetings that any program requiring coordination with another ministry, Ministry of Education, would require more time (see impact assessment below).

#### Smithsonian Institution

The Smithsonian Institution announced it is working with the National Council of Cultural Heritage to sustain cultural heritage and present Cuban culture at the 2017 Smithsonian Folklife Festival. The Smithsonian Institution and the National Council of Cultural Heritage declared that they hope to sign formal agreements soon, in order to support these present and future projects, as well as to further collaboration, advance cultural and natural research and promote outstanding and productive working relations.

#### National Endowment for the Arts

The NEA announced that it will commit \$100,000 to support cultural exchanges between U.S. and Cuban artists through two opportunities built on existing NEA programs that promote artistic exchange, education, and cross-cultural connections—USArtists International and Southern Exposure: Performing Arts of Latin America.

#### National Endowment for the Humanities

The NEH announced that it will give an award of \$30,000 to the University of Delaware/Winterthur Museum program to support a visit to Cuba by art conservation students and professors to focus on photograph collections and preventative conservation.

### **Impact Assessment**

Even at this interim stage, it is appropriate to look back on the trip and begin to assess its impact:

- This trip was tremendously productive. The decision by PCAH to visit Cuba, and use the new climate created by President Obama's diplomatic opening to press forward on cultural engagement, produced real and lasting results. Not only were several significant new ventures agreed to and announced, new forms of collaboration occurred between U.S. and Cuban governmental institutions, as well as between the Ministry of Culture and non-governmental entities (NGOs, civil society). The Ministry of Culture hosted an event at the Ludwig Foundation, which is a sign that the Government is open to collaboration with foreign NGOs.
- This trip also demonstrated the importance of continuing to build trust between the U.S. and Cuban governments. Two issues that were raised repeatedly at the Cuban Embassy and the Ministry of Culture were concern that there was USAID funding in the proposals<sup>3</sup>, and the importance of not announcing anything that wasn't mutually agreed upon. While the USAID concern turned out to be totally unfounded, the Turnaround Arts announcement was proffered as final before the Cuban government had fully agreed. Consequently, for PCAH to designate Cuba as the home of the first international Turnaround School and Cuban musician Carlos Varela as the first international Turnaround Artist, PCAH will need to engage the Cuban government in further discussions before this project is able to move forward.

In the month since the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities trip to Cuba, there have been several major cultural events in Havana: the filming of *Fast and Furious*, the Chanel Fashion Show on the Paseo del Prado, and the Musicabana Festival. Havana is exploding with new and old arts and culture initiatives. After the successful trip in April, the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities is positioned to support the growing number of U.S.-Cuba cultural exchanges.

### **Next Steps**

The PCAH trip to Cuba was a very successful step in the process of building a trusting, respectful bilateral relationship that honors the accomplishments of the arts and artists in Cuba and the United States. To expand on what has taken place, PCAH and the federal agencies represented on our trip will have to navigate both a complex Cuban terrain as well as the network of interests in Washington, D.C. that is deeply concerned about U.S.-Cuba relations, including those who oppose the rapprochement between the U.S. and Cuba. Providing such help is core to what CDA does.

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<sup>3</sup> Funds authorized by the Helms-Burton law have been used to finance so-called "regime change" under the auspices of USAID.

If desired, CDA would be happy to re-engage with the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities as it pursues the various Cuba initiatives that were launched or explored during the mission. CDA can offer strategic and practical guidance and support to any of the three agencies in working with the Embassy of Cuba, the Cuban Ministry of Culture, or other Cuban entities.

While many challenges lie ahead in the next phase of U.S.-Cuba normalization, the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities led by executive director Megan Beyer showed that respect, dialogue, and determination can lead to significant opportunities for collaboration and exchange not just in the arts but across the ideas and activities that can bring both countries together.

## APPENDIX

### Media Coverage

In addition to the substantive accomplishments of the trip, the PCAH visit to Cuba received extensive, positive media coverage. This is important and useful for building public support in the U.S. for further cultural collaboration going forward.

The President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities trip was covered in English by the following news outlets:

- [Information from the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Cuba](#), Granma, 4/14/16
- [U.S. Cultural Delegation to Visit Cuba](#), Radio Havana Cuba, 4/15/16
- [Usher, Smokey Robinson among those heading to Cuba for cultural diplomacy](#), Miami Herald, 4/15/16
- [Usher among U.S. artists visiting Cuba](#), Reuters, 4/19/16
- [U.S. delegation visits Cuba to increase cultural bond](#), Xinhua, 4/19/16
- [New cultural bridges between Cuba and the United States](#), Granma, 4/19/16
- [Usher and Kal Penn visit Cuba's University of the Arts](#), Metro, 4/19/16
- [Smokey Robinson and other U.S. artists hail new 'love' with Cuba](#), The Washington Post, 4/21/16
- [Joint Statement of the Smithsonian Institution and the Cuban National Council of Cultural Heritage](#), Smithsonian, 4/21/16
- [US Cultural Delegation Expresses Interest in Cuba](#), Prensa Latina, 4/21/16
- [Cuba, US agree to deepen cultural cooperation](#), Global Times, Xinhua, 4/22/16
- [Performances and jam sessions break the ice during first U.S. cultural mission to Cuba](#), Miami Herald, 4/22/16
- [José Martí, the National Poet](#), The New York Times, 4/22/16
- [Cuba Visit by U.S. Cultural Delegation, Memorable](#), Radio Angulo, 4/23/16
- [Artists Welcome in Cuba](#), HuffPost Arts & Culture, 4/27/16
- [American Stars Jam With Cuba's Best Musicians in Havana](#), NPR, 4/30/16

The President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities trip was covered in Spanish by the following news outlets:

- [Delegación de EEUU viaja a Cuba para intercambio cultural](#), U.S. Delegation travels to Cuba for cultural exchange, Martí Noticias, 4/14/16
- [Delegación cultural estadounidense visitará Cuba](#), U.S. cultural delegation to visit Cuba, Juventud Rebelde, 4/14/16
- [Usher y Dave Matthews viajarán a Cuba en delegación cultural oficial](#), Usher and Dave Matthews will travel on an official cultural delegation, Informador, 4/14/16
- [Llegará a Cuba misión cultural de Estados Unidos](#), U.S. Cultural misión will arrive in Cuba, ONCuba, 4/15/16

- [Usher y Dave Matthews viajarán a Cuba en una delegación cultural oficial](#), Usher and Dave Matthews will visit Cuba on a oficial cultural delegation, El Nuevo Herald, 4/15/16
- [Usher de vuelta en Cuba](#), Usher returns to Cuba, Vistar Magazine, 4/15/16
- [Usher está llegando a Cuba](#), Usher is arriving to Cuba, Vistar Magazine, 4/18/16
- [Delegación de Estados Unidos se acerca a la cultura cubana](#), U.S. delegation draws closer to Cuban culture, Agencia Prensa Latina, Escambray, 4/18/16
- [Nuevos puentes culturales entre Cuba y Estados Unidos](#), New cultural bridges between Cuba and the U.S., Granma, 4/18/16
- [Delegación cultural de EEUU promueve vínculos con Cuba](#), U.S. cultural delegation promotes connections with Cuba, EFE, 4/19/16
- [Usher y Dave Matthews recorren La Habana](#), Usher and Dave Matthews tour Havana, ONCuba, 4/19/16
- [Usher buscó el Hip Hop Cubano](#), Usher searched for Cuban hip hop, Vistar Magazine, 4/19/16
- [“A donde vaya la gente, los sistemas le seguirán.”](#) “Where the people go, the systems will follow,” ONCuba, 4/20/16
- [Kal Penn: Espero ver más arte Cubano en Estados Unidos](#), Kal Penn: I hope to see more Cuban art in the United States, ONCuba, 4/20/16
- [Arte y patrimonio, alianzas comunes entre Cuba y Estados Unidos](#), Art and Culture, common alliances between Cuba and the United States, Granma, 4/21/16
- [Delegación cultural de EE.UU. manifiesta gran interés en Cuba](#), U.S. cultural delegation manifests great interest in Cuba, Juventud Rebelde, 4/21/16
- [Usher y Dave Matthews calentaron La Fábrica de Arte](#), Usher and Dave Matthews heat up La Fábrica de Arte, Vistar Magazine, 4/21/16
- [Cuba y Estados Unidos trazaron una agenda de trabajo cultural](#), Cuba and the United States map out a cultural work agenda, ONCuba, 4/21/16
- [Dave Matthews: “Estoy obligado a regresar a Cuba.”](#) Dave Matthews: “I am obligated to return to Cuba,” Granma, 4/22/16
- [“Walls and Doors” Carlos Varela and Dave Matthews at La Fábrica de Arte Cubano](#), Progreso Habana, 4/23/16
- [Cultural Exchange Projects announced between Cuba and the U.S.](#), Granma, 4/26/16